

BIRDING SOUTH BROOKLINE

by Robert H. Stymeist

Brookline for birds? The first thing that comes to mind is the Brookline Bird Club, America's most active bird club. The Brookline Bird Club, however, has scheduled bird walks in the town only four times in the last thirty years. Or you might think of a busy Coolidge Corner, the best bagels in the state, or a good theater that continually shows interesting programs. The Boston Celtics used to practice in town at Hellenic College, and it was the home of the big Bird himself, Larry. *Boston Magazine* said in its September 1992 issue that Brookline is the fifth most desirable place to live out of 131 towns within a sixty-minute commute to Boston.

The truth is, at least 209 species of birds have been recorded in Brookline. I have found birding in the town satisfying in nearly every month of the year, but I have especially enjoyed searching for birds during the fall migration. The diversity of habitats found within the town's boundaries is highly varied and provides many areas to find a wide array of bird species.

Most of the town's green space is located in posh South Brookline, the home of the Cabots, the Gardners, and the New Kids on the Block star Joey McIntyre. A lot of the area is private property, notably the Allandale Farm, the Sargent Estate, and the Country Club, but there are many other great birding spots open to the public.

Larz Anderson Park

We will begin our journey at the newest park. The Larz Anderson Park recently reopened with hundreds of new plantings and a refurbished pond. Use the entrance on Newton Street, on the south side of the park. You can usually park along the road just past a row of rocks on the left. If the Museum of Transportation, housed in a big building to the right, is having an antique car show or rally, usually on Sundays, you may have to park at the top of the hill. Walk left along the thickets and cattail marsh against the Newton Street fence. Here push as hard as you can, and up from the thickets should arise Song, White-throated, and Swamp sparrows. Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Hermit Thrushes, Gray Catbirds, and Rufous-sided Towhees have all been found here in late fall and early winter.

Continue along the thicket, and you come to the restored pond, when it is open. Mallards and maybe a Black Duck can be found here, but more interestingly a kingfisher or Great Blue Heron can usually be approached within close range. A Snowy Egret was a surprise here last August. The pond has many fruit trees around it, and American Robins, Cedar Waxwings, and, yes, European Starlings can usually be found. Small birches around the pond

contained flocks of Pine Siskins and Common Redpolls feeding in the catkins many years ago.

The best area of Larz Anderson Park is the Community Gardens, which are located along Newton Street to the left of the pond. This area is best from September to December, most especially during the height of sparrow migration in October. It is usually a late freeze here, and the food supply tends to remain longer than in other community gardens. I have seen several Lincoln's and White-crowned sparrows here among the more regular Song, Savannah, and Swamp sparrows. In the fall of 1987, I had a wonderful look at an "Ipswich" Sparrow. I would expect that regular visits could produce a Dickcissel or a Blue Grosbeak. Warblers in the vegetable plots include Common Yellowthroat, Palm and Yellow-rumped warblers, and the rarer Orange-crowned Warbler and Yellow-breasted Chat.

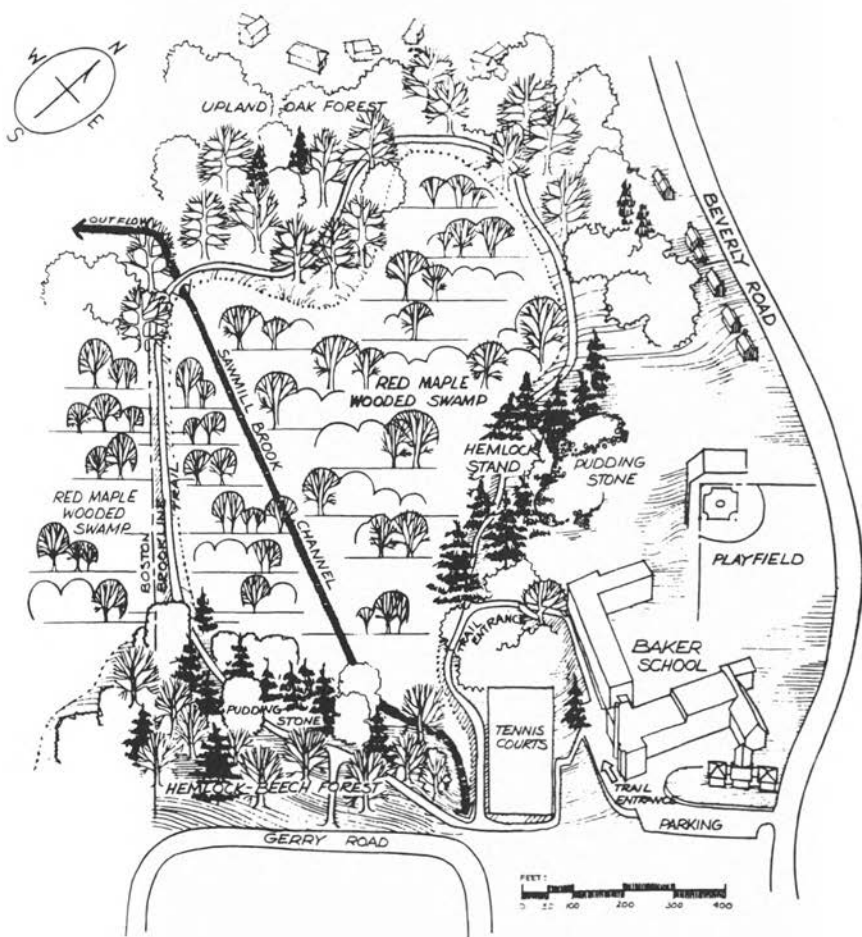
Continue to the top of the hill in the park, where a wonderful half-circle view of surrounding Brookline and Boston makes an ideal hawkwatch site in the fall. In the early eighties when I was living in Brookline, I enjoyed wonderful picnic suppers here. From August 15 through September 15, 1982, I saw over 2700 migrating Common Nighthawks.

D. Blakeley Hoar Sanctuary

Leaving Larz Anderson, take a right on Avon Street, and then right again on Newton Street. Travel along Newton Street for approximately 0.8 mile, and then take the left fork onto Grove Street. At the rotary (about one mile from Larz Anderson) continue straight through on Grove Street, and take the fourth right after the rotary onto Beverly Road (at a traffic light). Drive about 0.2 mile, and turn left into the Baker School parking lot. Drive to the rear of the parking lot, walk down the hill past the tennis courts on your right, and you are at the D. Blakeley Hoar Sanctuary. There is no sign, but the dirt trail over the brook is obvious. Follow the blue-dot loop trail that runs for approximately a mile through the sanctuary, which abuts the Leatherbee Woods in the West Roxbury section of Boston. The interesting rock formation throughout the sanctuary is called the Roxbury Conglomerate, or Puddingstone, unique to the Boston area. It gets its name from its resemblance to an old-fashioned fruit-filled pudding.

The sanctuary contains three major vegetation zones: a hemlock-beech forest, a red maple swamp, and a deciduous wooded upland. The hemlock-beech forest is characterized by its acid soil. It is the home of a Great Horned Owl most of the year and Pine Warblers in spring and summer. It looks prime for possible breeding Acadian Flycatchers.

The red maple swamp contains a wide variety of plants, including highbush blueberry, sweet pepperbush, and the dominant red maple. It also has a rich diversity of wildflowers, including jewelweed, and is reportedly a good place to look for Connecticut Warbler during the fall migration. This area has a wide



D. Blakeley Hoar Sanctuary Map.

Courtesy of the Brookline Conservation Commission.

variety of birds. Eastern Screech Owls have been heard here on nearly all my visits. Year-round residents are Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, Song Sparrow, House Finch, and American Goldfinch. Most recently a pair of Red-bellied Woodpeckers took up residence in the area. I found Carolina Wrens feeding young here back in 1980, a time when this species was still scarce in the Greater Boston area. Summer residents include Green-backed Heron, Wood Duck, Northern Flicker, Eastern Wood Pewee, Eastern Phoebe, Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, House

Wren, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Warbling and Red-eyed vireos, Yellow Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, Swamp Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, and Northern Oriole.

The wooded upland is filled with hardwood trees, including oaks, elms, and birches. This area backs up to many houses and can be the best area in the winter when birds are visiting feeding stations. Great-crested Flycatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Rufous-sided Towhee can be seen during the summer breeding season. A breeding census conducted here on June 20, 1993, tallied thirty-two species. Another interesting find here and at the nearby Leatherbee Woods was a daytime viewing of an eastern coyote on May 31 and again on June 3, 1993.

During the fall migration, anything is possible here. Because I have seen Orange-crowned Warbler several times, as well as a Mourning Warbler, Connecticut Warbler should also be looked for. In the jewelweed, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds dash in and out, and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers have been seen in the mountain ash. Late fall and early winter are still good for birds here. The abundant berry supply means that good numbers of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings can usually be found. Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Gray Catbirds, and Yellow-rumped Warblers can be found into January.

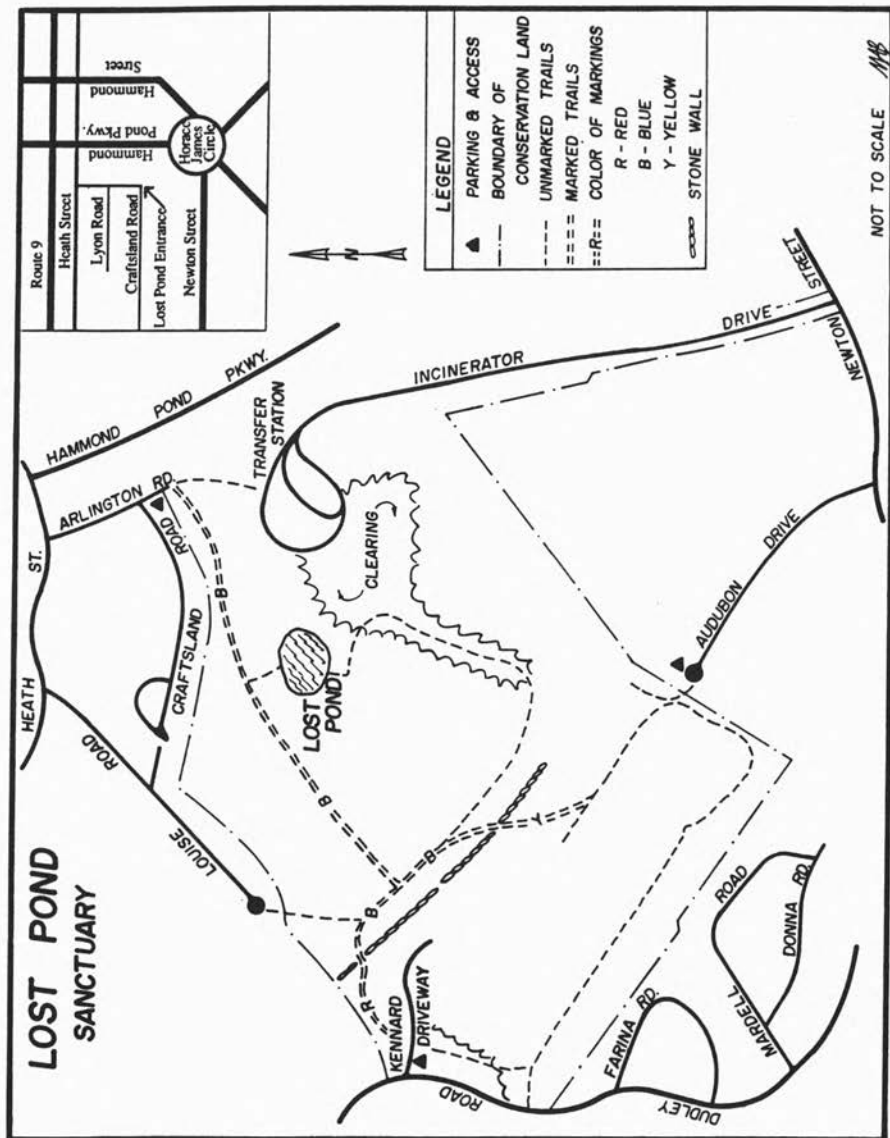
Lost Pond Sanctuary

Return to the Baker School parking lot, and turn left onto Beverly Road. Take Beverly Road until it ends (approximately 0.4 mile), and take a right onto LaGrange Street. Drive to the rotary (about 0.1 mile). Go four-fifths of the way around the rotary onto Newton Street. Drive approximately one-quarter mile to Incinerator Drive, or the dump road, on the right. You will recognize the dump road by finding the sign that says "positively no dumping." Park near the gate without blocking it, and enter on foot.

You are now in the Lost Pond Sanctuary, located in the extreme western corner of Brookline. This sanctuary is bounded by the town's transfer station (the old incinerator) and the Kennard Conservation Area in Newton. The total tract of natural, undeveloped land comprises over 115 acres.

Walk along Incinerator Drive to the transfer station. This road is generally not used on weekends, so birding along it can be pleasant. Lots of fruit trees and bittersweet make this ideal for feeding flocks of American Robins and Cedar Waxwings during the fall. In the late spring and summer a detour to the recycling area just to the right from where you parked is good for Indigo Bunting. In recent years at least two pairs of Indigo Buntings could be found here. A Red-tailed Hawk is often sitting on an old telephone pole.

At the end of the road, stay right of the incinerator, and find the overgrown trail to Lost Pond (see map). If you come to a fire hydrant, you have gone too far. Go back about thirty feet to the overgrown trail. These trails are old bridle



Lost Pond Sanctuary Map.

Courtesy of the Brookline Conservation Commission.

paths that have existed for many years and have been loosely marked. Rocks and fallen trees may be encountered providing a wilderness experience in the city. Lost Pond, still hard to find, is almost inaccessible because it is surrounded by a natural growth of hemlock, pine, and white cedar, and the margin is covered by a variety of shrubs. Waterproof footwear is recommended, especially for those attempting to reach the pond.

Carolina Wrens are found here throughout the year, and Barred Owls have been noted on many occasions. This area is also in the range of a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers, which have been seen sporadically. I have seen fresh drillings but not the birds. The tangles of greenbrier are home to Gray Catbirds and Rufous-sided Towhees. Pine Warblers, Ovenbirds, Scarlet Tanagers, Hermit and Wood thrushes, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Red-eyed Vireos breed near the pond. Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Swamp Sparrow, and Red-winged Blackbird all nest. The old landfill area has Savannah Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and American Kestrel as summer residents. The area looks prime for Eastern Bluebirds. A Henslow's Sparrow was found here on the Greater Boston Christmas Bird Count on December 20, 1982. This very cooperative bird was seen by scores of birders through early January. Other interesting birds found here included Black-billed and Yellow-billed cuckoos, Yellow-breasted Chat, and three Mourning Warblers in late May 1992. A breeding survey conducted June 20, 1993, recorded a total of forty species, among which were some very interesting surprises. A pair of Red-shouldered Hawks were calling constantly, and a Winter Wren sang continuously at the pond. Other notables were five Wood Thrushes, sixteen Gray Catbirds, and eight House and four Carolina wrens.

Another access to Lost Pond for those with limited time is at the end of Arlington Road (see map).

Putterham Meadows Country Club

Return to your car on Incinerator Drive, and take a left onto Newton Street back to the rotary. Bear right at the rotary. Almost immediately, take a left into the Putterham Meadows Country Club. Drive to the rear of the parking lot near the pine woods. In the tall pines, a pair of Great Horned Owls can usually be found, especially in fall and winter. It is also a good place to find Golden-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Yellow-rumped Warbler in late fall and in winter. In summer Pine Warblers, Black-throated Green Warblers, and Ovenbirds breed, along with a pair of Indigo Buntings.

Other Areas

There are also a number of smaller and less spectacular areas with limited public access in Brookline. If time permits, a visit to **Walnut Hills Cemetery** on the corner of Grove Street and Allandale Road (about one mile from

Putterham Meadows Country Club) could produce a few species. I have seen Great Horned Owl there and in a stand of hemlocks, where architect H. H. Richardson is buried and where flocks of White-winged and Red crossbills were found too many years ago.

Hammond Pond, actually located in Chestnut Hill in neighboring Newton, is good in the fall for Pied-billed Grebe, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Hooded and Common mergansers, and American Coot. The pond can be reached by going behind Bloomingdale's on Route 9. A Least Bittern was present at the pond one spring. Recently Red-bellied Woodpeckers have been found in the nearby woods.

The **Brookline Reservoir**, located at the intersection of Route 9 and Chestnut Hill Avenue, is another good place for Ruddy Ducks and both mergansers in the fall. Because the Olmstedes, Charles Sargent, Charles Eliot, and H. H. Richardson all lived in the neighborhood, the grounds of the reservoir were laid out with particular grace. The area is used heavily by joggers, who do not disturb the ducks. The best place to look is along Walnut Street on the south side of the pond.

I would like to thank Henry T. Wiggin of Brookline for compiling and publishing a list of all the birds seen in the town. Henry was a member of the Brookline Conservation Commission from 1966 to 1989, serving longer than any other conservation commission member of any of the 350 cities and towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Henry continues to add new birds to his yard list as well as to actively search for birds with his friend, Margaret Argue (see Steele, M., 1993, *Fifty Years of Birding: An Interview with Margaret Argue*, *Bird Observer*, 21(1):5-14), on weekends.

A special thank-you should also be given to the Brookline Conservation Commission, which, with the help of dedicated friends groups and other volunteers, manages the Lost Pond and D. Blakely Hoar sanctuaries, both of which have been described here. Each of these areas is unique and together they preserve a variety of habitats. Birding in the city can provide endless fascination once you begin to look closely. Enjoy!

ROBERT H. STYMEIST is *Bird Observer's* department head for bird sightings. Bob enjoys finding birds in urban areas.

For the best
selection of
Field Guides
visit the
Audubon Shop



For all your birding needs:
binoculars, scopes, field guides,
feeders, videos, tapes,

*The Audubon Shop also has a wonderful
selection of natural history books,
children's books, nature-related gifts,
garden items, T-shirts, puzzles, cards,
posters, stuffed animals and much more.*

MASSACHUSETTS
AUDUBON SHOP



Route 117, Lincoln, MA - 617-259-9661
at Drumlin Farm Wildlife Sanctuary
Shop Hours: Tues. - Sun. 10 to 5

YOUR PURCHASES HELP SUPPORT THE MASSACHUSETTS AUDUBON
SOCIETY'S MISSION OF EDUCATION, CONSERVATION & RESEARCH.